

## **In Between** by **jhuniemarieilarde**

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**Summary:** After 2x09...the nightmare is finally over but not for Joyce. She was able to free her son from the monster that made a home in his body but it backfired on her in a terrible way. Will Hopper be able to find out about it in time or will he be too late to save Joyce? (just because I love #jopper so much...I cooked up this one. Enjoy!)

# 1. Chapter 1

*Get the hell out of my son!*

The dark shadow came out of Will's mouth, nose, and eyes. Jonathan and Nancy curled together as they both can't bear the sight of Will suffering. A wave of force threw them backwards and the three landed on their backs. The noise and the screaming stopped. Will is finally free of the Mind Flayer.

Joyce got back on her feet real fast and went to Will. He is weak but conscious. Jonathan turned off all the heaters around them as Nancy opened the windows and the door to get some air.

"Hey, baby...we're here. We're here", Joyce said to her son.

"Mom...is it over?" he asked.

"Yes, sweetie. It's over", she answered.

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Hopper and El got back in the cabin after closing the gate. El is weak but she'll live. Mike and the Party gathered around her while Hopper checked on Will. Joyce brought them coffee from the kitchen. She would've cooked something but Hopper's fridge is completely empty.

"Thanks", Hopper muttered and then turned his attention to Will.

Joyce stepped back and leaned against the wall. She's been exhausted from everything that just happened but she never felt it before. She's too occupied by the thought of saving her son. Now, things caught up with her. She's exhausted and drained. On top of that, she hasn't slept for more than 24 hours now.

"Mrs. Byers?" Nancy called snapping her out of her thoughts.

Heads turned to Joyce.

"What is it?" Joyce asked in a weak and exhausted voice.

Jonathan and Hopper stood up slowly as if their seeing something's

off.

"Mom, your nose is bleeding", Jonathan said.

Joyce put her hand on her nose and saw the blood. She frowned a little wondering why she hasn't notice it herself but she's too lightheaded to explore the question. Hell, she's too lightheaded to even say anything.

"Joyce?" Hopper called.

She looked at him wanting to say a word but it's too late. She collapsed and hit the floor.

"Joyce!" Hopper rushed to her side.

"What's wrong with her? What's wrong with my mom?" Jonathan asked in panic.

Everyone tensed. They're on a verge of celebration and something happened again. Mike held Will trying to keep him steady and calm.

"She's burning up. We need to take her to the hospital", Hopper said.

"What kind of hospital?" Nancy asked.

"The normal kind", he answered and then carried her with his arms. "Kids, stay here. Do not leave the cabin", he ordered.

They are about to protest but El stopped them. She understood that tone in his voice. He means business. She doesn't want to argue, not now. She met her father's eyes and they nodded at each other in agreement.

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Hopper and Jonathan waited outside the hall while the doctor is checking on Joyce inside the room. They are both tired too but they can't rest, not yet at least. It's one thing to face a monster but to ponder the idea of losing Joyce, it's unthinkable.

"How you holding up, kid?" Hopper asked Jonathan trying to kill the silence around them. It's also his way of keeping himself awake.

"I don't know. Just a few hours ago, I almost lost my little brother and now my mother is in the hospital. I don't know how I would feel", he answered as honest as he can be.

Hopper looked at him and understood everything he said. He was there. Their family has been through so much. First, Will's disappearance and then he was possessed by those monsters. He doesn't think the family can take another hit especially when it comes to Joyce.

"Yeah, me too. This is new to me. You know, I knew your mother since high school and she and hospital don't get along. She hated the hospital. Whenever she'll have cuts, she'll fix it herself. Damn, one time she tried stitching the cut on her left arm herself that it got infected. I had to force her to go to the hospital and believe me, it's a long agonizing argument inside the car", he said.

Jonathan looked at him.

"What was she like, my mom? I heard stories from other people but they're not consistent", he asked curiously.

Hopper smiled at the question. It already brought back so many memories in his head that he doesn't know where to start.

"Boy...she's fearless. Until now, she is still fearless. She's just a force to be reckoned with. Of course, she's very popular back then", he started.

"Popular? We're talking about Mom here, right?" Jonathan asked in disbelief.

"Oh yeah? She was very popular. All the boys in the school were chasing her like dogs. She was breathtaking. But even though she's the popular girl, she's different from all of them. She didn't like hanging out with the cheerleaders. She liked flying solo. Then, one day I was smoking on my own. She caught me and I thought, 'shit, she's going to tell on me now', but no. She said, 'please tell me that's Camel'. I couldn't help it and I laughed. I gave her one and we've been smoking under the steps ever since", Hopper continued.

Jonathan laughed. He knows how his mother smoke. She smokes like a chimney especially when she's stressed.

"Can I ask you a question and can you promise to answer me in full honesty?" Jonathan asked. Hopper nodded. "Were you and Mom like together back then?" he shoots his question.

Hopper was caught off guard by the question but he knew it's going to come one way or another.

"Yeah, we were. I know it's hard to believe. Jim Hopper and Joyce Horowitz. It's an odd combination. We were happy though. We really were", he answered while taking a stroll down the memory lane.

"What happened?" Jonathan followed up.

"Me happened. After high school, I sort of detached myself from her. I was having trouble with my old man and I couldn't bring myself to tell her, to let her in. I shut her out and when things got worse in the Hopper household, I ran away. I left. After a few years, my father died. When I came back, I found out Joyce married Lonnie. She married Lonnie fucking Byers out of all people in Hawkins. I hated myself for it. She can do better and I'm not saying it should be me but there are a lot of better choices in this town. She went with him and I hated myself for leaving in the first place so I left again. That's the biggest regret of my life", he answered.

Jonathan can understand why he feels that way. His father is not a good man. If it was up to him, he wouldn't recommend his father to his mother too. He will find someone better, someone that will take care of her, someone that will not hurt her.

"She has good instincts but I think that when she made that decision of marrying my father, she's completely drunk", he muttered.

Hopper looked at the young man and laughed hard. Jonathan laughed as well and for a moment, they have freed themselves from the anxiety and worries they're going through. Then, the laughter is gone. They're back to where they started.

"Hey, she's going to make it. Your mother is tough and strong. If there

is anyone who can get through this, it's her", Hopper said to him.

"Thank you, Chief. Thank you", Jonathan said. Hopper tapped him on his shoulder. "...and just so you know, I don't think Jim Hopper and Joyce Horowitz is an odd combination. I think it's about right. I really do", he added.

The door opened the doctor came out cutting off the conversation between the two men. They got up at the same time.

"How is she?" Hopper asked the doctor.

"Weak...her blood pressure dropped and her immune system is crashing. If she can get more hours of sleep, a good rest with no stress, no heavy workloads, her body will recover. She needs to take care of herself more", the doctor answered.

The two sighed in relief. They thought it was monster-related but it turns out wrong. It's a natural response of her body to everything that just happened.

"She'll be okay then, I mean, after she gets the sleep and the rest?" Jonathan asked just to be sure.

"Yes. Tomorrow, she can go home too", the doctor answered.

"Well, that is good news", Hopper muttered.

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The next day, Joyce returned home as well as the kids. They allowed her to rest inside her bedroom as per the doctor's instructions. Will recovered pretty fast and is back to playing again with his friends while El spends time with Hopper. Despite their constant arguments, they missed each other.

"So you're going to Snowball?" Hopper asked.

"Yeah, Mike asked me to go. Is that okay?" El answered then asked him back.

"I guess it's okay as long as I will drop you off and we will be home before nine", he answered and laid out his terms.

El smiled at her father and nodded in agreement.

"Yes. That's good", she said.

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The night came and Joyce woke up. Her eyes adjusted fast to the darkness in her room. She felt a lot better after long hours of sleep just like the doctor has said. She got up and opened the lampshade. She saw her reflection on the mirror and it made her rolled her eyes around. She looked like a mess. Her hair is all over the place. She then grabbed the comb at her nightstand and tried to fix her hair. Then, the comb broke. It didn't break because of her hair but it broke its handle.

"Seriously?" she muttered.

She found the boys in the living room getting ready for the Snowball.

"You know that is not how you fix a tie, Jonathan", she said to her sons.

"Mom? What are you doing up? The doctor said you should just rest and sleep", he asked.

Joyce scoffed and went to them to fix their ties.

"I slept and I rested. Do you really think I would want to miss my two boys going to Snowball?" she answered.

Will laughed as his mother fixed his.

"Come on. You don't want to be late", she said.

"I can take care of Will, Mom. It's fine", Jonathan said trying to be protective of his mother.

"You and Nancy will have fun. Pick her up and be her date. I will drive Will to the school. Come on, Jonathan. I raised you to be a gentleman", she insisted to which he cannot refuse.

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While everyone is dancing inside the gym, Joyce chain-smoked

outside.

"You cannot stay in the bed long enough, can you?" Hopper greeted with a smile.

"Apparently not. How's El?" she asked.

"In there dancing with the Wheeler's kid. How are you doing?" he answered then asked her back.

"Better. Thank you for bringing me to the hospital, by the way, and for everything", she said and he nodded at her with a smile as they flood the parking lot with smoke.

Joyce put her hand onto her car to adjust her position when she noticed that it dented her car. She frowned at it but didn't mention anything to Hopper.

"It's a good night, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yeah, it is", she answered with fear in her eyes.



## 2. Chapter 2

Weeks passed and things seemed to return to normal. The kids went back to school. Hopper is now officially El's father and Jonathan and Nancy started an internship at the local newspaper. Their lives seemed to move on from the events that almost ended the lives of everyone in Hawkins except Joyce.

She still works at Melvald and still the same loving mother to her boys but there are things she can't shake like the constant nightmares. The doctor's advice of her getting long hours of sleep is not applicable to her anymore. The concealer hid the dark circles around her eyes so her kids won't know that she hasn't slept properly in a couple of days. Every now and then, she will catch glimpses of what they went through at the lab. Add to that the weird things happening with her like how fragile objects had become whenever she held them. She's breaking things easily and her temper is running short day by day.

"Joyce?" Hopper called at the counter.

Joyce looked at the tall man in front of her. She completely lost track of everything that she didn't notice Hopper coming in the store. She noticed him holding art papers.

"El got an art project?" she asked casually like nothing is out of ordinary.

"Yeah...she called me earlier", he answered trying to let it fly but he can see through her.

He knows something is troubling her. She's been avoiding him since the Snowball. At first, he thought maybe she's keeping her distance because she's still grieving about Bob and him wrapping his arms around her isn't appropriate just yet. Now, he can see it's more than that. She's good at keeping things in but not to him. He's known her for so long. He can read her like a book.

"Joyce, what's wrong?" he finally asked.

"What? What do you mean?" she asked him back.

Hopper scoffed.

"Please, don't do that. I'm not some customer who walks in your store that doesn't even know your name. It's me and I know you. Tell me what's going on with you, Joyce", he clarified.

Joyce stiffened. She knows that look. It's that look that means business and will get angry if she started dancing around his question. She looked down unsure if it's right to tell him things. He has to know. That is for sure. She looked back at him and decided to tell him everything but as she opens her mouth and formed the words inside her brain, things came out that she didn't think of saying.

"Stay out of my life", she said.

Hopper leaned back surprised at how cold she said those words to him. He doesn't know where it came from.

"What?" he asked.

Joyce's eyes widened. That is not what she's going to say, not even close. She can see the confusion in his eyes. She took a deep breath and tried again.

"I don't need you", she said.

She looked down squeezing her eyes forcing herself to be coherent. She wanted to tell him that something strange is going on with her and that she can break things with her bare hands and that she's having nightmares and that she doesn't feel okay with anything. Joyce clenched her fist feeling frustrated that she cannot tell him what she wanted to say like something is blocking her.

"Go away, Hopper", she muttered.

Once she looked up, he saw something else in her eyes. Her words were harsh but her eyes are full of pain and kindness. It's so opposite from what he's hearing. He noticed how hard her hands were clenched like she's struggling with something.

"Joyce, I am not going anywhere until you tell me what the hell is going on here. You are acting really weird right now. It's not just me who noticed it. Jonathan, Will, even El noticed it", he insisted pushing her buttons to talk.

Joyce shook her head biting her tongue. She doesn't want to say things to him that she doesn't want to again.

"Are you scared? Is it me or something supernatural is happening here? What is going on, Joyce?" Hopper pushed harder and that broke the meter.

Joyce slammed her hand onto the counter real hard.

"I said stay the hell out of my life!" she yelled losing herself in that split second.

She regained herself once more and saw the shocked look on Hopper's face. Filled with embarrassment, Joyce left the counter and ran outside. Hopper didn't follow. Instead, his eyes are fixated on the counter where she slammed with her bare hands. It's dented like it was smashed by a hammer.

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Joyce went straight to her house and locked herself inside the bedroom. Tears kept falling from her eyes.

"What the hell is wrong with me?" she muttered as she paced back and forth.

She looked at her palm and it doesn't even have a bruise on it from slamming the counter that hard. It's not even red. She tried to recall that force that was stopping her from telling Hopper everything. Something forced to say other things instead to him. She felt sick to her stomach so she ran to the bathroom and puked.

"Jesus", she muttered when she saw strands of decaying vines on the sink. Those came out of her.

"Mom! We're home!" she heard Will called from the living room.

She quickly ran it down with water and then fixed herself to hide her

dilemma from her son.

"Coming!" she replied.

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Hopper got home and El is waiting for him. She looked happy when she saw the art papers he got from the store.

"I got a question for you and I don't want you to panic but I need answer", he started.

El looked at her dad and paid attention closely.

"When you closed the gate, it cut the connection of the Shadow Monster from the Upside Down to this world, right?" he asked. El nodded. "...and you're sure that it is completely closed?" he asked again. El nodded again. "Is it possible that even if it's closed, he can still have access here in our world, the monster?" he asked once more.

El paused and studied his face.

"Something happened. What is it?" she asked.

"Hey, I said no need to panic. It's just question", he said trying to stop his daughter from worrying. "Is it possible?" he asked again.

El thought about it for a moment. She was able to make contact with it even before the gate was opened but that's her with her powers.

"I guess so but there has to be something here or someone powerful enough to connect with it, get through the gate even it's closed", she answered.

Hopper looked down thinking deeply.

"We don't lie to each other", El reminded him.

"If I tell you, promise you will not tell anyone. Promise you will not tell your friends, Mike, especially Will and his brother", Hopper said. El nodded. "It's about Joyce. I think something is wrong with her", he revealed.

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Inside the Byer's home, Joyce is sitting by herself in the kitchen. It's already dark but she didn't bother turning on the lights. Will left an hour ago to go to Mike's house to play. She stared at the space while smoking her cigarette.

Jonathan came in and turned on the lights in the living room. He looked at his mother's bedroom but she's not there. He knows she's home because her car is outside. He went to the kitchen and found her sitting there with her cigarette.

"Mom", he called but she ignored him like she didn't hear him.

He thought that maybe she's sad because of losing Bob. There were times when he will catch her staring at Will's drawing of him on the fridge. He turned on the lights in the room to get a good look at his mother.

"Turn it off", she said coldly.

"...but it's dark", he muttered.

"Turn it off, Jonathan", she said firmly.

"Mom, it's been some time. I know it's tough seeing him die like that but we got to move on. He would want you to move on too", he tried to explain but the lights suddenly turned off on its own.

Jonathan halted looking at the switch's direction. He turned it back on. After a few seconds, the lights went off.

"What the hell?" he muttered then turned it on again.

He watched it closely. He wants to see if the switch will move on itself again. Then, the light bulb exploded. Jonathan gasped. Joyce got up and walked quietly towards her son.

"I told you. Turn it off", she said and then headed towards her bedroom. Right before she went in, the lights in the living room went off too. Then, she closed the door leaving Jonathan scared at the kitchen.

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Meanwhile, El put the blindfold on herself as Hopper setup the TV. He held her hand for a moment then let go once she's ready.

El entered into the void to find Joyce. She found her in her bedroom sitting on the floor, hugging herself. The windows are all opened and there is no light. Her eyes are sore from crying but she cannot stop. El kept her distance. Then, Joyce got sick again so she grabbed the trash bin and threw up the decayed veins from her stomach. El can see how much she's suffering. She started walking closer to her. Then, Joyce suddenly looked directly at her.

"You can see me?" El asked.

"Yes, I can", Joyce answered.

Hopper can hear Joyce's voice coming from the TV's speaker.

"Are you okay?" El asked.

Joyce shook her head like she's afraid to talk.

"Hopper wanted to know what's happening. He thinks that it could be the monster", El said.

Joyce put her hands on her head as she tries to compose herself. El waited patiently until she's ready to talk.

"I didn't mean all the things I said to him. He won't let me talk. He doesn't want me to tell him what's going on because he knows Hopper will try to stop him", Joyce said.

"Who is he?" El asked.

"His voice is in my head now. Then, sometimes I will just lose myself and someone else will take over. It's like I'll be inside a cage and all I can do is watch. I cannot control my own body. It's like I'm imprisoned in my own brain", Joyce started rambling.

"I don't understand. Is it the monster?" El asked again.

"He's making me say things I don't want to say. He wants me to do things for him but I can't do it because that would mean I'm going to

have to hurt people", Joyce continued.

El was about to say something when Joyce gasped and a hand grabbed Joyce's neck and pulled her back.

"No!" El yelled as she tried to come after Joyce but she cannot reach her anymore.

Hopper turned off the TV and removed El's blindfold. She jumped on him and hugged him tight to feel safe. He rubbed her back to calm his daughter.

"It's alright, kiddo. I'm here. I'm right here", he whispered as El sobs.

"It got her", she muttered in between sobs. "The monster got her", she added.

### 3. Chapter 3

Hopper rushed to Joyce's house without El. He doesn't want to put his daughter at risk and after everything she went through, she deserves to sit this one out. The house is totally dark which made him scared for Joyce. He didn't bother knocking. He kicked the door open and went straight in. According to El, she's inside her room.

"Joyce!" he called before he even reached the bedroom door.

Jonathan came out of his room pale face and all. He knew that he knows about Joyce's odd behavior. Jonathan didn't stop the Chief from breaking Joyce's bedroom door. Once it swung open, they both saw Joyce lying on the floor unconscious.

"Jesus..." Hopper muttered then ran to her side to check her pulse.

"Is she alive?" Jonathan asked.

"Yeah...she's alive but her pulse is weak", Hopper answered.

"What happened to Mom?" Will asked.

The two guys stunned to see the youngest Byers outside of the room. They didn't hear him come in. Behind him are Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and Max. Stupid bikes...if they have a car, they would've heard them.

"We don't know. Go to your room and take your friends with you", Jonathan answered his brother.

The boys looked at Joyce and then noticed the trash bin next to her. Will felt the strange sensation behind his neck. Fear struck him as he has never felt that again after El closed the gate.

"No way...we can help. Those are veins right? From the Upside Down?" Mike declined and pointed at the trash bin.

Hopper and Jonathan looked at it and saw the same thing. They didn't notice it earlier because they're too focused on Joyce.

"How the hell did those get here?" Jonathan asked.



"It came from Mom", Will answered. They all turned to him. "When I first got back from the Upside Down, I always got sick so I used the bathroom a lot. I would throw up things from the Upside Down. At first, it thought it's nothing. It must've been because I stayed there for so long so I got some inside me and my body was finally rejecting it, freeing me from it, but I was wrong", he added.

The Party knew what he's talking about. He told them about it before. It's how Dart ended up in Dustin's house's trash.

"If that is true, then how did Joyce get this? She never stayed in the Upside Down. We went there once but that was over a year ago and we were both there", Hopper asked.

No one said anything after that. No one knew the answer. Hopper grabbed Joyce's wrist so he can monitor how her pulse is doing. He wanted to check if he needs to bring her to the hospital so he started counting her heartbeat.

"I think she fainted. Her heartbeat is steady. She should come to in a few minutes", he confirmed.

"You should let us help, please. We know we can help", Max said.

"Totally...we can be your researcher. We don't need to fight monsters. We can just do research", Lucas added.

Hopper looked at the kids. He knows they mean well but he doesn't want to risk involving them further.

"Please, Hopper. It's my mom. We want to help", Will finally said and that convinces the Chief.

"Alright...but all you will do is research. No fighting monsters, no exploring places without any adults present. Do you understand?" Hopper asked.

"Yes! Yes, we do", Dustin and Lucas answered in unison.

"Alright...go to the cabin. El is waiting there. She's starting with the research", he said.

Jonathan looked at him unaware that El knew about what's happening with his mother.

"El knew?" Mike asked.

"Yeah, now go before I change my mind", Hopper answered and the kids ran back to their bikes. "You should probably go with them", he then said to Jonathan.

"What? No. I am not leaving her", he declined.

"I am here, kid. I'm not leaving her. Your brother and his friends need you and frankly, I will be relieved if you're there with them. At least, I know they're in good hands. Please. I'll take care of your mother", Hopper explained.

Jonathan knew that. He and his mother have a lot of history and he can see that Hopper still loves his mom. He can trust him to take care of her.

"Okay. Call me if you need anything", Jonathan said and then left.

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Joyce opened her eyes and saw Hopper looking at her. She recognized that she's in her bedroom and the light was turned on.

"Hopper? What are you doing here? What happened?" she asked still trying to recall what happened before she passed out.

"I came here for you. You're in trouble", he answered briefly trying to toughen himself up.

She tried to move when she realized her both hands are handcuffed to the bedposts. She tried to pull it off but she's not strong enough. Then, she turned to Hopper in a puzzled look.

"What is this? Why am I handcuffed to the bed?" she asked again.

Hopper swallowed. He knows it's about to get tough and painful but he needs to do this for Joyce.

"I know you got it inside you, Joyce. We all do. I also know that you

cannot talk about it because it is stopping you from doing so. It's alright. We are doing everything we can to help you but I need to put you on those to keep you and everyone around you safe", he answered as calmly as he can despite the situation.

Joyce understood everything he said. She is thankful of his efforts to help her but she knows the handcuffs are no good. She wanted to tell him that she's sorry for all the trouble she's causing and thank you for caring but the thing that's inside her brain won't allow her.

"Help me? You can't even help yourself, Hopper. Chief of Police, fancy title, huh? Were you able to help Barbara? No. Were you able to help Bob? No. For God's sake, you weren't able to help your own daughter! So tell me, Hopper, how in the world you're going to help me?" she snapped.

Hopper leaned back. Though he knows, it's not Joyce, it still hurts to hear those words in her voice. He know she didn't mean any of those things but he can't help but feel guilty. Those people did die on his watch. He regained his composure and looked at her.

"...by doing everything I can. I will not give up on you, Joyce. I will never give up on you", he said.

He got up and about to go out the door when the lights turned up brightly.

"Hopper", Joyce called.

He turned around and saw Joyce with tears in her eyes. It's her. It's really her. Her arms are trying to break free from the handcuffs. He can see the reddish marks on them already. Then, the window shuts. The bedroom door locked on its own trapping them both inside. Joyce screamed and she managed to break the handcuffs.

"No!" Hopper yelled but then the lightbulbs exploded.

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Hopper opened his eyes and found himself in a dark place. There is water all over him. He quickly got up and looked around. It's the same place El used to tell him when she goes and find people though

he has no idea how the hell he gets there.

"Mom, look at him!" Jonathan's voice rang throughout the empty space.

"Just wait! Just wait!" Joyce's voice followed.

Hopper searched for them until they saw Jonathan, Nancy, Joyce, and Will. The little boy is tied up on a bed while the three are surrounding him. He can recognize the bed Will's on. It's in his cabin. Then, Will freed his right arm.

"No!" Joyce yelled as she quickly jumped on top of Will trying to stop him from releasing his other arm.

Will grabbed his mother's neck and choked her. Hopper remembered that it was the night, he and El closed the gate. The Byers are in the cabin to burn the Mind Flayer out of Will. He watched helplessly as Will chokes the life out of his mother. Then, Nancy burned the left side of Will's body freeing Joyce from his grip.

"Get the hell out of my son!" Joyce yelled at Will and black smoke came out of Will's mouth, nose, and eyes.

Hopper followed the smoke with his eyes but before it can get out of the cabin, it swirled around the ceiling and then spreads producing a wave of force that threw everyone away. Joyce flew backwards and hit her head on the wall before falling down the floor. Jonathan and Nancy also got knocked out.

"Joyce?" Hopper called overflowing with concern for the unconscious Joyce.

All of a sudden, he saw the black smoke slowly makes its way to Joyce and entered her body. Once she opened her eyes, she quickly got back on her feet and went to Will while the other two turned off the heater and opened the windows and the door. He now understood how it happened.

"Hopper", Joyce called from behind.

He quickly turned around and saw her with tears in her eyes. She is

looking pale than usual. Joyce managed to let out a smile but it is evident how much fight she's putting just to stop the Mind Flayer inside of her.

"You brought me here?" he asked.

"Yes. It's the only way I can talk to you, really talk to you", she answered and then took a deep breath. "I'm sorry for all the things I said. You have to know that I didn't mean any of those. It's not what I wanted to say but I can't..." she tried to apologize but Hopper stopped her by pulling her to his arms.

"I know. I know that", he muttered.

Joyce relished the little moment she has with him even if it's only in their minds. She then pulled back to look him in the eye.

"It's too late", she muttered.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"It is happening all over again", she answered.

Hopper frowned.

"Joyce, the gate is closed", he reminded her.

"...not anymore", she said.

His heart beats a little faster. The amount of power it took from El to close it was too much and now it's open again.

"What? How is that possible?" he asked her.

Joyce only shook her head trying to remain in control of herself.

"He knows about her. He is so angry. He has so many plans for this world and he wouldn't make the same mistake again. No one can stop him this time. He will make sure of that, Hopper", she answered.

Hopper tried to dissect each word she says but it's hard.

"Joyce, are you talking about the Mind Flayer?" he asked again.

Joyce cried and nodded her head.

"I am so sorry, Hopper. I really am. I have no choice", she said. He let go of her arms. "She has to die and I'm going to be the one to do it. Like I said, he'll make sure no one will stop him this time", she added.

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Hopper opened his eyes and now he's back in Joyce's bedroom. She is nowhere to be found now and the door is wide open.

"El..." he muttered.

## 4. Chapter 4

The Party are in Hopper's cabin. Jonathan and Nancy are there to watch over the kids. El explained to them everything she knows including the conversation she had with Joyce in the dark place.

"Do you think the Mind Flayer inside Will transferred to his mom?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know. We were there and we didn't see anything", Nancy answered.

They turned to Will for his opinion.

"I am not sure. I can't remember", he said.

"Do you get that feeling behind your neck whenever your close to your mom?" Mike asked his best friend.

"Yeah, once...when I saw the veins in the trash bin in her room. I felt it again but it's very weak like fading. It's not as strong as when it's with me or when I was in the Upside Down", he answered.

"Well, it could be because the gate is closed. The connection is almost not there. I mean, if Mrs. Byers is totally possessed, she will do something right now to open the gate right?" Max suggested.

It made sense. Joyce has it inside her for weeks and she didn't do anything other than denting the counter at Melvald and her car. She is fighting it really well.

"How are we going to help her then?" Lucas asked.

"We do it the same way we help Will. We burn it out of her", Dustin answered.

"Yeah, I remember Mom always leaving the windows open and she doesn't like it when I turn on the lights", Jonathan remembered.

"You guys are forgetting one thing. What happens when that thing gets out of her? It can transfer to anyone else in the room", Lucas

said.

They all thought about it for a moment. He has a point. When it came out of Will, it just looked for another host and went to Joyce. They need to stop that from happening.

"We can lock it inside a room where it can't get out of", Nancy muttered and everyone turned to her. "Sauna...if we can get Mrs. Byers in there, we can lock her up and turned up the temperature. Once the Mind Flayer is out of her body, we will turn on the ventilation system", she added.

"...and we can capture it if we hijack the airducts of the pool", Mike realized. Her sister nodded at his conclusion.

"Great...let's do it then. Chief is with her at home. I'll call him", Jonathan said and then walked towards the phone when someone knocked on the door.

Everyone stopped moving. They're sure it wasn't Hopper because it's not the secret knock. They waited until the knocking comes again. No one spoke or made any noise.

"Jonathan? Will? Are you guys there?" Joyce called out from outside.

They looked at one another.

"What is she doing here? Where is Chief?" Mike asked Jonathan.

"Look, guys...it's freezing out here. Can you open up please? Hopper went to the lab. He asked me to go here where it's safe. Open up please", she said.

"Did she say it's freezing outside?" Dustin asked everyone and they all nodded.

"She doesn't like cold anymore", Max muttered.

Everyone agreed in unison to let her in so El opened the door using her powers. Joyce rushed in hugging herself. She's only wearing a white shirt and jeans. She's also barefooted. Jonathan hugged her and felt how cold she is. They sat her down and El handed her a blanket.



"What happened?" Jonathan asked his mother.

"Hopper put me in the tub with hot water. He did what we did to Will and he got it out of me", she answered.

The kids smiled at the news. The Chief has done their plan for Joyce.

"Why did he go to the lab?" El asked her.

"He said he needed to make sure that the gate is really closed. He has doubts. I told him I wanted to go but he said I should go here with you and that he'll be back here", Joyce answered.

The others finally can breathe. The problem has been solved and in a matter of minutes, Hopper will join them in the cabin to celebrate. El then turned to Will who is frozen at the corner just staring at his mother. His hand is behind his neck and his face is filled with fear. El turned to Joyce who is talking with Jonathan.

"Where is he?" El asked in a different tone.

"Where is who?" Joyce asked her back.

"Where is Hopper?" El clarified.

"I just told you. He's at the lab", Joyce answered.

El shook her head.

"You lie. The Mind Flayer is still inside of you. You're lying", El declared.

Jonathan got up and looked at her and then back to his mom. She seems okay to him. She seems okay to everyone.

"Are you sure about that, El?" Mike asked and she nodded. El pointed at Will at the corner and they all got what she meant.

He can still sense the Mind Flayer in her which means she's lying and faking the whole thing. Joyce chuckled a little and then removed the blanket around her. Her expression is different from the one when she walked inside the cabin. With a flick of her hand, the windows

and the door swung open.

"I get it now why he wanted you gone so badly. No matter what he does, you'll always be there to stop him. That's why all of these must happen. It's all because of you, Eleven, Jane, El, whatever you want to call yourself, you'll always be Eleven. You'll always be that same lab experiment who's trying to be one of us but you just can't", Joyce said playfully.

"That is not true", El muttered.

"Oh yeah? If it wasn't for you, none of these will happen in the first place. You opened that gate. You let us in. You're the reason why all those people died, why your friends are in this mess. It's all your fault, little freak from the lab", Joyce taunted her more.

In her frustrations, things inside the house started shaking. Joyce only smiled at the result of her efforts.

"Come on, Eleven. Show everyone who you really are", she said.

Then, El threw the radio towards her but it stopped midair. The shaking stopped. Everyone halted at the sight of the radio a few inches away from Joyce's face. She only smiled and looked at El.

"The girl who opened and closed the gate to another dimension, really? This is all you can do? Jesus...I can do it in my sleep!" Joyce exclaimed and threw the radio out of the house with her mind.

Everyone was stunned by what just happened. No one knows that Joyce has powers too like Eleven. Only Hopper saw that she can dent metals with her bare hands but he's not there to inform them about it.

"She's got powers too", Nancy muttered in shock echoing what everybody's thinking.

El pushed her backwards and Joyce hit the wall.

"That's it. Come on. Run!" Mike yelled and everyone ran outside.

Jonathan and Nancy went to the car right away and started the

engine.

"Come on! Faster!" Nancy yelled at the kids.

El was the last one to run outside. Dustin, Max, Lucas, and Will got inside the car while Mike stopped to wait for El. She's already half way to the car when she stopped running.

"El, come on! We need to get out of here!" Mike said but she's not moving. "Come on, El. Run", he added.

She tried to move her legs but it's like she lost control over them. She then looked at Mike and shook her head.

"I can't move", she muttered.

Then, a force pulled her back inside the cabin as the windows and the door shut as soon as she got in.

"El!" Mike called and ran back to the cabin.

The others followed and went to the cabin but it's all closed. They can only hear El screaming and crying inside and things getting smashed on the floor.

"El! Open the door!" Mike yelled as he continues to bang at the door.

"Mom! Please, open the door. Mom!" Jonathan called for his mom.

Will kept his distance. He can still feel the sting of the Mind Flayer behind his neck and going closer to his mother makes it stronger.

"Get out of the way!" Hopper yelled from behind them as he pumped the shotgun in his hands.

Jonathan and Nancy instantly grabbed the kids away from the door. Then, Hopper fired at it and the door went open. He went straight in right away and found El floating in midair while being choked by Joyce using her powers. The inside of the house is like an unlucky path of a passing tornado. Joyce's head is bleeding and so is El's. They both have injured one another from fighting but Joyce seemed to be more powerful than El.

"Joyce! Put her down!" Hopper yelled at her.

She only looked at her with a challenging look that's saying 'make me'. He is so torn between El and Joyce at this point. He knows what to do but he can't do it. But if he does nothing, his daughter will die and if he does something, Joyce might die. In that split second, his eyes met Joyce's. The kids tried to attack Joyce to distract her from El but with a wave of her hand, they all slammed onto the wall like flies. Her eyes fixated on Hopper and just like that, he was transported once again to another place.

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"Joyce! Joyce!" he called out.

"Right here", she said behind him.

"Hey, you need to stop this. You can't kill El", he said.

"I know that but I cannot stop, not on my own. He is just too powerful for me to fight. I've been fighting him for a long time and I have no strength left", she explained.

He noticed her head is no longer bleeding. She got no bruises or cuts all over. She is her normal self.

"Tell me how to stop him. I can help you. Please, just tell me how", he pleaded.

Joyce smiled at him and reached towards his gun on his belt. She took it and handed it to him.

"Use it", she muttered maintaining the smile she has on her face.

"What?" he asked.

"There is no other way, Hopper. You cannot get it out of me without him putting up a fight and you cannot win. He knows you will never hurt me. That's why I need you to use it. Save your daughter, Hopper", she answered.

He cannot believe what she's asking of him. He wanted to help her, to save her, and now she wanted him to end her life. That is the

opposite of saving in his dictionary.

"I don't think I can do it", he said.

"Then your daughter will die, Hopper", she replied. She gently put her hand on his face. "It's alright. I promise", she added.

---

Hopper opened his eyes and it's like everything is in slow motion. The kids trying their best to stop Joyce, Jonathan and Nancy helping with distracting Joyce. El is still up in the air gasping for air. He then looked at his hand and his no longer holding the shotgun. Instead, he's holding the gun Joyce handed to him. Joyce's eyes are now fixated on killing El. She got her right arm reached up like she's squeezing El's neck without actually touching her. Hopper looked down once more and contemplated for a brief moment before looking back at Joyce, pointing the gun at her, and then pulled the trigger.

## 5. Chapter 5

Joyce fell on the floor releasing El from her grasp. El fell down gasping for air. Mike and the other members of the Party rushed to her side checking if she's alright. Jonathan and Will were shocked on the side while staring at their mother who is bleeding on the floor. None of them know what to say or how to react. El looked at her father who took a couple of seconds to regain himself before rushing to Joyce.

"You shot my mom", Jonathan muttered.

"That's right. I did", Hopper replied as he checked the bullet wound.

"You killed her?" Will asked.

"No, kid. I didn't kill your mother. I shot her on her right shoulder", he answered as he put pressure on it. "Any ideas how are we going to get this thing out of her?" he asked everyone.

Nancy is the first to recover from the shock of watching Joyce being shot.

"We take her to the sauna. Jonathan and I can deal with the air ducts to capture the Mind Flayer", she answered.

Hopper nodded at Nancy's plan and carried Joyce in his arms.

"Let's do this", he said.

---

As soon as they got in the facility, Nancy and Jonathan were joined by Steve and Dustin who helped with the alteration of the air ducts. Meanwhile, Hopper and the others set up the sauna for Joyce. He was able to stop the bleeding on her shoulder. Thank goodness, it was through and through. El ran her fingers on her bruised neck. She's still shaken up by their fight in the cabin. She's faced a lot since she escaped the laboratory but none was able to put up a fight like Joyce did. All the things she said played back in her head. Perhaps, it was true. It's her fault. She watched as Hopper settled the unconscious

Joyce inside the sauna. None of that would have happened if she didn't open the gate in the first place.

"Are you okay?" Mike asked her.

"No. I am not", she answered then looked back at Joyce. "Look at her. She's not supposed to be in this situation, Mike. None of you should be in this situation. I caused all of these", she added.

"Hey, don't blame yourself. It wasn't your fault either. Those people pushed you to your limit and asked you to do something they didn't understand. If there's anyone to blame here, it's them. It's not your fault", Mike said.

"It doesn't make me feel better either. Joyce is a good person. She is a good mother. This is not supposed to happen to her", El said.

Hopper checked Joyce's wound and to his surprise, it's healing fast.

"We're set", Nancy said on the radio.

"Let's roll", Hopper said.

They left Joyce inside the sauna and locked the door with steel bar and chains. Hopper turned up the temperature inside the room. They waited few minutes before Joyce finally opened her eyes. She saw the steam surrounding the room and her body is starting to sweat. She got up without paying any attention to her bullet wound. She walked towards the door and looked at the window.

"Let me out of here! Hopper! Let me out!" she yelled angrily.

Hopper held Will's hand to comfort the young boy. It's not easy for him to watch his mom go through to the same stuff he went through just a few weeks ago. Joyce banged on the door and they can see how strong she is. If it continues, she will break it open.

"It burns in here! Let me out, please!" Joyce pleaded.

She stopped touching the door because it's already heated by the high temperature. Her bare feet feel the sting of the hot floor. She screamed as her body is rejecting the parasite inside of her. The lights

started flickering and the tiles and bricks on the wall started cracking. Joyce started using her power on the door but El stopped her by using hers to prevent the door from breaking. Hopper looked at his daughter. He turned up the heat more to weaken Joyce. He knows she can defeat El easily but if she's preoccupied by the temperature she's in, she will be distracted. Joyce stopped fighting inside.

"Hopper...Hopper...please", she muttered almost crying inside.

He peeked through the foggy window just to make sure Joyce is still alive. She is curled up on the floor crying from the pain.

"I don't want to do this anymore. It hurts", she whispered.

Joyce groaned and flinched as the parasite inside her moves inside her body trying to seek refuge from the heat. Every move it makes, brings pain to Joyce. Hopper can see the black marks roaming Joyce's body. Then, in one loud scream, the parasite came out of Joyce's body.

"Now!" Hopper yelled and Max turned on the ventilation system.

The black smoke went inside the air duct and traveled through the pipes Nancy, Jonathan, Steve, and Dustin designed until it reached the end where a glass cage was waiting for it. Nancy shut the cage locking it inside.

"We got it!" Dustin radioed the others.

---

Hopper opened the door and pulled Joyce outside. She is now as pale as a paper. The dark circles appeared around her eyes. Her body is covered with bruises.

"Joyce? Joyce?" Hopper called hoping she will open her eyes.

Will kneeled down next to his mom.

"Mom, come on. Wake up. The monster is gone. It's finally over", he said.



Hopper put his fingers on her neck to feel her pulse. They all waited for him to confirm what they wanted to hear. He sighed and then smiled when he finally felt it.

"I felt a pulse", he muttered.

Then, Joyce coughed and gasped for air as she opens her eyes. Hopper helped her up while rubbing her back.

"Mom! You're awake!" Will exclaimed in joy.

Joyce looked at him and smiled.

"Yeah, baby...I'm finally awake", she said and pulled him into her arms.

Jonathan and the others joined them and saw that Joyce is back as herself. She saw her son and smiled at him. Jonathan ran to his family and hugged them both.

"I am so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you", she apologized recalling the things she did while being possessed.

"It's alright, Mom", Jonathan said.

They all pulled back and Joyce met El's eyes. She doesn't know what to say to the kid she almost killed but El ran to her and hugged her tight. Tears fell from Joyce's eyes. At that point, it's impossible to figure out what emotion is making her cry, pain, relief, sadness, joy, regret, guilt, shame.

"I am so sorry, honey. I never wanted to hurt you. I wasn't strong enough to fight him", Joyce apologized.

"I know. You don't need to say sorry", El said.

Joyce met Hopper's eyes and that was it. They don't need words to communicate. They just know what each other has to say. Hopper smiled at her which she returned. Steve looked around the place.

"I hate to break the moment but how are we going to explain this mess?" he asked.

"Yeah, and what are we going to do with this?" Nancy followed up holding the glass cage.

Joyce looked at it and cringes. Even though it's out of her body, she can still feel its presence like it's reaching out for her. Hopper noticed that and he pulled Joyce to him.

"We should put that away far from here", he answered.

"Down the ocean would be best", Lucas suggested.

"No. That's not far enough. We have to take it back to where it came from", Joyce intervened.

They all turned to her.

"It has to be gone from our world", she added.

"...when you say the gate is opened, it is really opened", Hopper remembered.

"Yes...we need to take it to the gate", Joyce replied.

---

El, Hopper, and Joyce went to the lab to take the piece of the Mind Flayer back to the Upside Down. Joyce was right. The gate is opened but it's not like before. There's a crack on it that allows the Mind Flayer to take control of Joyce. El lifted the glass with her mind and pushed it towards the gate. She created a small hole just enough for the cage to get through. After that, El closed the gate with her powers.

"There you go. It's finally over", Hopper declared.

El smiled and wiped the blood off her nose.

"Let's go home", she said.

Joyce just smiled at them and then take one last look at the gate.

"Yeah, let's go home", she agreed.

---

After two days, a celebration is held at the Byers' home. Joyce cooked meals and ordered pizza for everyone to celebrate their victory from the Mind Flayer. Nancy and Jonathan conducted games for the kids while Hopper and Joyce watched them while smoking and laughing.

"You guys carry on. I'll take this to the kitchen", Joyce said as she carried the plates.

"Let me help you with that", Hopper volunteered and carried the rest of the dishes.

The two went to the kitchen where it's quieter.

"Thanks", Joyce said.

"Oh, it's nothing", he said.

"I didn't mean the dishes", she added.

They both looked at each other. He knows she means the things he did for her when she was possessed by the Mind Flayer. She has said a lot of cruel things to him and she almost killed his daughter. He has forbid her from saying sorry to him because he doesn't need it. He knows it's not her fault. She tried her best to fight it.

"I'll do it all over again if I have to, except shooting you with my gun. I don't think I can do that again", he said and they both laughed.

"For what it's worth, I didn't feel a thing. In fact, I don't even have the scar", she teased.

Hopper raised an eyebrow.

"Wow, that is not fair", he muttered and they laughed some more.

Once the laughter is over, things went serious. Hopper held her hand and just stayed there for a moment. Joyce didn't pull her hand back. She wanted to feel his warmth too.

"I know we've been through a lot, all of us, and I shouldn't be asking of this now but after all of those obstacles and almost losing you, I have to ask. Will you have dinner with me?" Hopper asked.

"You mean like a date?" she asked curiously.

"Yeah like a date and I don't mean like smoking session in the parking lot. I mean, a real date in a nice fancy place. What do you say?" he answered then asked her back.

"I would love that very much", she accepted and it put a big smile on Hopper's face.

"Hopper! Come on! It's your turn!" El yelled from the living room.

"Gotta go...I'll see you back there", Hopper said and then returned to the living room.

Joyce smiled as she started washing the dishes. She's so excited that she forgot the water glass next to her and she hit it off the sink. Her reflexes kicked in and her hand tried to catch the glass but it stopped right before it hit the floor. She frowned and studied it for a moment. The glass is floating on its own. There is no one in the kitchen but her. She grabbed the glass and set it on the sink. She then looked at her hand and tried to recall what happened before.

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*She pulled El back inside the cabin and threw her against the wall. She started slamming her against the walls of the cabin. Then, one bullet that came out of Hopper's gun hit her fast on her shoulder. Joyce slid back a little before hitting the floor. She fell just right onto Eleven's blood that dropped on the floor after being slammed onto the walls multiple times. Her blood was quickly absorbed by Joyce's body as the parasite inside her helped her body heal rapidly.*

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Joyce is now standing in the middle of a dark space, the same dark place she used to be in. She can hear voices coming from a far. She walked and walked until she reached a group of Russian men talking to one another. She cannot understand what they're saying but they seemed so into it. Then, a machine appeared in front of them. It fired up against a concrete wall and a few seconds later, a crack appeared on it. Joyce's eyes widened in shock. She knows exactly what it is.

"Joyce? Joyce?" a voice called to her but she cannot remove her eyes

on the wall as the crack continues to grow. "Joyce? Joyce?" the voice repeated.

---

"Joyce?" Hopper called and held her shoulders.

She looked at him and realized she's still in her kitchen. Hopper looked worried in front of her. She's not sure whether it's a dream or not. She then turned to look at the water glass on the sink. It's right where she put it after she grabbed it out of the air. It's not a dream.

"What the hell happened?" he asked.

"What?" she asked him back.

Hopper wiped the blood off her nose, something she didn't notice.

"Tell me", he insisted.

Joyce swallowed for a moment and took a deep breath.

"I was there in the dark place", she answered.

"The dark place? The one you used to pull me into?" he asked and she nodded. "I don't get it. How is that possible? The Mind Flayer is out of you", he asked again.

"El...I'm not sure how to explain it either but I sort of absorbed her powers when our blood mixed up. I was there and there were these people trying to open it", Joyce explained.

Hopper's heart started pounding. This is not happening again, he thought. They're just starting to celebrate.

"What did you see exactly?" he asked one more time.

"There is another gate", she said. Hopper frowned. "I saw another gate but it's not in the lab and it is opening", she added.

"Where is it, Joyce?" he asked.

"It's here in Hawkins. I'm sure of it because it felt so close but those

people, they're not the same doctors who used to run the lab. I think they're Russians and they're here in Hawkins", she answered.

**THE END**

**I HOPE YOU ENJOYED READING THIS STORY I CAME UP WITH.  
UNTIL THE NEXT STORY!**